


2007

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Imtiaz Habib  
*Old Dominion University*

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## Repository Citation

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## Original Publication Citation

Habib, I. (2007). Racial impersonation on the Elizabethan stage: The case of Shakespeare playing Aaron. *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 20, 17-45.

# Racial Impersonation on the Elizabethan Stage: The Case of Shakespeare Playing Aaron

IMTIAZ HABIB

## I

IF racial construction is a clairvoyant performance, the creation of a virtual human reality from another psychic realm, its greatest provenance will be in the theater. Acting, as the production of virtual persons, is predicated on another that will be fabricated, so that different sexual or ethnic lives are the staple of the industry of the stage. This symbiotic relationship between drama and the other, that is to say between mimesis and alterity, is what drives the postcolonial philosopher Michael Taussig, following Walter Benjamin, to assert that “the ability to mime, and mime well,” which is to say act and act well, “is the capacity to Other.”<sup>1</sup> Insofar as early modern racial discourse is a heavily colonial product,<sup>2</sup> from a postcolonial standpoint it follows, then, and is a neglected truism for post-structuralist cultural studies in general, that the rise of racial discourse in early modern England is intimately connected to the rise of popular drama in the early colonial reign of Elizabeth I.<sup>3</sup> The multiplicity of racialized representations in the popular English drama between 1587 and 1640 testify to the onset of this otherwise unnoticed and only recently studied discourse that traditional historical acknowledgments have been wont to see as operating clearly only from the middle of the seventeenth century onward, most notoriously in the transatlantic slave trade. But while over the last decade and a half important analyses of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English racial constructions have focused on the *figurative* representations of race in elements of material texts and in discrete cultural formations, including language,<sup>4</sup> there has been little opportunity to examine the political dynamics of the *literal* impersonation of race onstage.<sup>5</sup> If, however, that has been due in part to the paucity of documentary details of racial acting in Elizabethan drama, a significant breakthrough for race studies as a whole in the period is afforded by the plausible albeit speculative data of Donald Foster’s stylometric SHAXICON tests regarding specific roles Shakespeare may have played, specifically that he may have played Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, as well as Morocco and Antonio in *The Merchant*

of *Venice* and Brabantio in *Othello*. Unraveling the complex psychosocial transactions involved in such possibilities provide valuable new insights into the compulsions and difficulties of racial discourse in Shakespeare and his world.

The usefulness of the data produced by SHAXICON stems from its reasonably cautious methodology, and from its generally corroborative compatibility with the existing information of traditional scholarship on Elizabethan playhouse documents and theater history, and on the beginnings of Shakespeare's professional career. "Electronically map[ping] Shakespeare's language so that we can now tell usually which texts influence which other texts, and when," SHAXICON'S "lexical database indexes all words that appear in the canonical plays 12 times or less. (These are called 'rare words')." What this demonstrates, in Foster's own words, is that:

The rare words in Shakespearean texts are not randomly distributed either diachronically or synchronically, but are mnemonically "structured." Shakespeare's active lexicon as a writer was systematically influenced by his reading, and by his apparent activities as a stage player. When writing, Shakespeare was measurably influenced by plays then in production, and by particular stage-roles most of all. Most significant is that, while writing, he disproportionately "remembers" the rare-word lexicon of plays concurrently "in repertoire"; and from these plays he always registers disproportionate lexical recall (as a writer) of just one role (or two or three smaller roles); and these remembered roles, it can now be shown, are most probably those roles that Shakespeare himself drilled in stage performance.

(SHAXICON '95, 1)

Applying this test Foster finds that in *Titus Andronicus* Shakespeare played "probably Aaron or old Lucius, or possibly alternating between these roles" (SHAXICON '95, 4). Additionally, SHAXICON indicates that in *The Merchant Venice* "Shakespeare seems to have played Antonio in all productions; but Morocco is a second 'remembered' role," and that in *Othello* he played "Brabantio" (SHAXICON '95, 3).

The cautiousness of SHAXICON's methodology is indicated, first by the fact that it has no knowledge of traditionally ascribed play dates and of Shakespearean authorship, and second, despite the test's confirmation of three roles traditionally attributed to Shakespeare, that of Adam in *As You Like It*, the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and Old Kno'well in Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, by Foster's emphatic (and subsequently repeated) warning that "this catalogue cannot be *proven* to represent historical reality" (emphasis added).<sup>6</sup> Although in the intervening decade since its release SHAXICON has been successfully challenged, that has focused mainly on its claim of Shakespearean authorship for the nondramatic text *Funeral Elegy*, which Foster himself has subsequently withdrawn.<sup>7</sup> But despite its controversial reputation, and despite being now regarded by some as a "moribund" study, and akin to "coun-

terfeiting Shakespeare” (fueled, one suspects, by an understandable but unnecessary traditional humanities apprehension about the mechanization of things literary by the emergence of statistical and electronic studies), its method of statistically derived internal stylistic analyses of Shakespeare texts, particularly of “rare words,” for deriving a variety of insights about Shakespeare’s writing and performing life, has proven useful and drawn cautious adherents.<sup>8</sup> Overall, and without implying a position for or against the validity of SHAXICON’s methodology and findings as such, it is possible to suggest that the list of probable acting roles for Shakespeare that it indicates is not incredible, because it is congruent with traditional scholarly knowledge of Shakespeare’s early career.

To take as a case in point SHAXICON’s indications about *Titus*, the uncertain history of the play’s origins, between 1592 and 1594, associated as references to the play are with Pembroke’s-Strange’s-Sussex’s-Chamberlain’s Men singly and in combination (ignoring here the “early start” argument of E. A. J. Honigsmann ascribing a late 1580s date, and the even more dubious but ingeniously constructed Oxfordian argument ascribing a 1570s date), does not affect the possibility and the significance of Shakespeare playing Aaron.<sup>9</sup> The conflicts and issues within that history all point to Shakespeare beginning his theater career as an actor and writer (as the Robert Greene, Henry Chettle references to him suggest),<sup>10</sup> for whom it is perfectly consistent to write crowd-winning lines/roles/texts that he could himself help to make successful in performance while seeking employment in times that were uncertain for both, the industry as a whole (plague years, playing companies’ breakups and reformations) and the playwright in terms of his struggling beginnings in the London/Southwark performance scene. Traditional scholarship has already noted that *Titus* is one of the two early tragedies that seems to have been written to impress, in terms of the unusual demands it makes on its producers.<sup>11</sup> In the racial discourse of an early colonial environment, a key crowd winner is the impersonation of a racialized life on the stage, as is witnessed by the fact that according to the payment records in Henslowe’s *Diary Titus Andronicus* was performed five times between 1593 and 1594, with the fattest takings on his lists for each of those occasions, including sometimes three times per week.<sup>12</sup> In what follows, this paper will not try to analyze how Shakespeare played Aaron and the other related racial roles or to prove that he did in fact play them. Rather, it will explore the psychosocial dynamics of what it meant for him to have probably done so. SHAXICON’s findings provide not the proof but the cue for such a speculative exploration.

## II

The impersonation of a racialized life is a preference on the part of the actor-playwright, and in that racial impersonation is primarily projective,

striving to cast a perceived similitude of difference for the enjoyment of a kind of virtual solidarity. Irrespective of whether *Titus Andronicus* is a revision of the older *Titus and Vespasian* held by Strange's Men and given for reworking to a young Shakespeare seeking to show his mettle or is a fresh script composed by him with the same compulsions, and irrespective of whether the scripting of a black role in the play is the first instance of the representation of color on the popular Elizabethan stage or whether that scripting merely follows the seminal lead of George Peele's *Battle of Alcazar* racially played with such success by Edward Alleyn in 1587,<sup>13</sup> the writing and playing of race in *Titus* is a Shakespearean choice. The developed independent role of the doubly demonized Moor with the Jewish name, identifiable in no source but directly evocative of the additional racialization potential of anti-Semitic dramatization popularized by the endless success of Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, is "peculiarly Shakespearean."<sup>14</sup> It is a choice with a particular psychic signature. It is indicative not so much of a knowledge of the black life or of a desire to know it as of a need to project it exploitatively to make it known, to render it usably into a larger social imaginary. At this fundamental level, racial playing is unavoidably implicated in an identificatory impetus, the gesture of oneness with the object of representation that is the quintessence of the mimetic act.

The cosmetic details of race's physical depiction on the Shakespearean stage, first catalogued by Eldred Jones, and cited recently by Dymphna Callaghan,<sup>15</sup> aim at external phenotypical conflation, facing white with black, which is consistent with the "externalized" quality of late Elizabethan acting as opposed to the "subtler" effect of the later acting of Burbage as differentiated by Andrew Gurr.<sup>16</sup> The physical staging of the black life in Aaron, inscribing and reinforcing conventional traits of that life gathered from the morphology of popular Elizabethan cultural constructions such as the travel writings of Richard Hakluyt, Richard Eden, and others,<sup>17</sup> as well as from novel experiential encounters with the small but growing numbers of captured African populations in London, constitutes for playwright-actor and his protocolonial audience an enjoyment of the black other who with his "cloudy melancholy . . . [and] . . . fleece of woolly hair" fights to save his species against the imperial order that has enslaved him and in revenge busily plots its destruction. Carried by a logic of representative inclusion, the demonizing performance of Aaron functions obscurely as a kind of virtual solidarity with the marked-down black subject who is by that very representation added to the protocolonial English socius's circuit of visibility. For the denigratory impersonator and his audience, the "wretch-ing" of the marginal black wretch is acceptably enjoyable, in other words, because it offers to culturally showcase him in return.

At the same time, the obscurity and the virtual (rather than real) nature of the instinct of solidarity within the projective performance of racial imper-

sonation makes the latter also racial critique. Critique is implicit in the act of impersonation itself, in that the act substitutes the real with its mimesis, which can become a denial and cancellation of the real and hence a critique of it. To ask, as Dympna Callaghan does in her seminal essay, why if there were blacks were they not used on the Elizabethan stage,<sup>18</sup> is to confront the expurgatory regime of Shakespearean racial acting in which the black subject can be *re-presented* but not allowed to present itself. A homologous instance of this is the performance, six years after the first staging of Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, of the historical Mary Frith or Moll Cutpurse in *The Roaring Girl* at the Fortune theater, in which she can watch the performance but not participate in it.<sup>19</sup> This is the similitude of difference that serves as a reminder of separation from the enacted product (beyond the instinct of solidarity and empathy with it), and thereby works as a critique of it. The contrarious mimetic reflex between critiquing re-presentation and projective presentation has been described by Alexander Leggatt as the distance between the early modern English actor standing “as it were, beside the character, commenting on it,” and “showing it off,”<sup>20</sup> which is to say, performing it. This is the self-pointing gesture of the Aaron actor’s onstage likening of his “fleece[y]” hair to the uncoiling of “an adder” about to do “some fatal execution,” and of his explication of his “deadly-standing eye . . . [and] . . . silence,” as signs of “vengeance,” “blood,” and “revenge” (2.3.32–39) that makes his projective enactment of the black life a simultaneous denunciation of it.

If to Robert Weimann, discussing the psychic mechanics of performative disfigurement in *Richard III*, the phenomenon marks “the difference between the closure of representation and the aperture of its transaction,” and the “gap inhabited by the player presenting himself in the act of disfiguring the object of representation,”<sup>21</sup> that same performative disfigurement underwrites Shakespeare-as-Aaron’s coloring of his “soul black like his face” (3.1.205), in the precise syntax of popular Anglo-European iconographic tradition. The negative projectivity of the role and its personal enactment by Shakespeare becomes, then, a censorious collective ritual between personator and audience of a reduction of the black life, and because of the known collaborative nature of Elizabethan popular drama, an enacted communal critique of its existence. According to the experienced theatergoer Edmund Gayton, writing in 1654 but describing what could plausibly be held to apply five decades earlier, Elizabethan spectators come to a performance “not to study . . . but [to] love such expressions and passages which with ease insinuate themselves into their capacities.”<sup>22</sup> Since for the typically substantial and already excitable audience at the Rose the power of performance is accelerated by its closely packed atmosphere, the effect on that audience of the fantasy of performance cannot have been only to direct their energies instantly on to “the nearest available women” as Leggatt observes,<sup>23</sup> but also to inculcate long-term attitudes toward minority ethnic prey in the neighborhood at large. In

this popular theater would perform what Leggatt, citing a modern sociologist of popular drama, says such demotic performances do, which is to “inform members of a community about social structure.”<sup>24</sup> The nullifying review of the black life in the Shakespearean performance of Aaron assumes a still clearer point in SHAXICON’s additional indication that he also alternated as “old Lucius,”<sup>25</sup> the character that is Aaron’s formal judge and sentencer at performance’s end, the latter role formally emphasizing and ensuring the critiquing depiction of the former. Shakespeare’s acting of both roles is nothing more than the literalization of his direction of the racial roles written by him, in keeping with his habit of directing the acting as noted by his colleagues such as John Lowin and Joseph Taylor, and suggested by Andrew Gurr, and a part of the general practice of Elizabethan playwrights as remembered by the seventeenth-century English antiquarian and biographer John Aubrey in 1681, and by foreign visitors such as Johannes Rhenanus, a German physician impressed with the English public theaters in 1613.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, solidarity exists uncertainly with, and is punctuated by, the drive of the writer-player’s nascent colonial culture to govern and control the differential threat of the black other who exists for it paradigmatically on a sliding scale between attraction and repulsion, fascination and fear. This simultaneous anxious containment is what in different ways Ania Loomba and Dymrna Callaghan have both described. For Loomba this is early modern English drama’s subliminal obligation to manage popular fears about, and reverse the historical reality of, the subsumption of English cultural ideology by Turkish and Eastern nonwhite cultures by rehearsing its obverse, and for Callaghan this is Elizabethan cultural discourse’s reduction of the potency of the black life by the othered mimesis of it onstage.<sup>27</sup> Not merely are victorious Ottoman Turkish military assaults on Europe relentless throughout Elizabeth’s and James’s reigns, so are their cultural triumphs, as the succession of considerable and continuous Christian conversions to Islam in both reigns attest. Whereas this alarming development inspires a popular English play (Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turned Turke*) and coins the word “renegado” in James’s reign as Nabil Matar and C. A. Patrides before him have both shown, this popular trepidation of the non-English/non-European/non-Christian/nonwhite Other gathers force earlier and is a part of the popular imagination of London in the 1590s.<sup>28</sup> Within the conflationary habit of early modern racial othering described, for instance, by the Jacobean figure who inherits the pioneering colonial ethnography of Richard Hakluyt, Samuel Purchas, in which peoples of different regions and cultures are indistinguishably lumped together,<sup>29</sup> Turks, East and West Indians, and Muslims also become black, which then stands in, not just for Africans, but for all those others as well. More specifically, in the 1590s in London itself, the numbers of “veritable negro[es]” themselves, to use the infamous words of one modern Shakespeare editor,<sup>30</sup> are considerable and growing, as parish registry re-

cords across central, east, and south London, in and near neighborhoods and areas of Shakespeare's known residences and workplaces such as Bishopsgate, Clerkenwell, Aldgate, and particularly, Shoreditch and Southwark, indicate. In the last three decades of the sixteenth century, captured black people, individually and in families, in a variety of bondages and relationships, including cross-racial ones, are living in parish neighborhoods such as St. Botolph, Aldgate; St. Mary Bothaw; St. Olave, Hart Street; St. Olave, Tooley Street, Southwark; Christchurch, Newgate; All Hallows, Honey Lane; St. Pancras, Soper Lane; St. Benet Fink; St. Mary, Mounthaw; St. James, Clerkenwell.<sup>31</sup> Elizabethan black existence is also documented in tax returns as Eldred Jones showed long ago, in court papers, as in the case against the Marrano Jewish physician Hector Nunes in 1588, in which his blackamoor maids are made to testify against him but not in their own person, and in medical records, as in Simon Foreman's casebooks describing his treatment of a black maid named Polonia in 1597.<sup>32</sup> Hostile popular English responses to the assimilatory struggle of the sixteenth-century Tudor black subject, while being documented as far back as the beginning of the century by Robert Fabyan's amazed recollection of two Westminster Africans perfectly turned out in English manners and clothing, are best typified by George Best's well-known troubled ruminations in 1576 about a black man fathering a black child with a white woman in London.<sup>33</sup> Several entries about cross-racial unions in the parish registers record more tersely the same animus.<sup>34</sup> The growing number of blacks eventually prompts, of course, Elizabeth's three deportation orders for them in 1596 and 1601.<sup>35</sup> Irrespective of the exact numbers of black people resident in Elizabethan London in the closing decades of the sixteenth century, that population must have been numerous enough to be instantly noticeable to a young Shakespeare first arriving in London at the end of the 1580s and living amid, and in proximity to, such neighborhoods for him to have immediately recognized their spectacular theatrical potential and for him to have decided to represent them onstage in one of his earliest dramatic enterprises and his very first tragedy.

Seen against this specific history and material context, and particularly within the now-compelling possibility that Shakespeare may have encountered black people firsthand, more than his conception of the negatively marked black man in Aaron, his performance of the role himself (in the Rose in Southwark, in the early 1590s) acquires a particular charge. It parallels, and responds to, the repressed historical black subject's struggle for acceptance, which is to say pass for white, in late Tudor London. If assimilation is the successful assumption of a particular kind of social being, the becoming of someone else and the entering into a new life, the colonized black Elizabethan subject's struggle to assimilate is the symptom and cue for his derisive racialized impersonation onstage. In this symbiotic exchange, black passing for white is profiled and reversed in the performative recasting of black by



white as unsuitable for assimilation.<sup>36</sup> As the engine of Titus's "tragic" failure to reconstruct both, the feuding body politic of imperial Rome and the body of his ravaged family, Aaron (who is an unofficial slave just as the majority of blacks in the Elizabethan parish records are unofficially bonded, i.e., personally possessed "servants") is also the undesirable racial outsider in the white metropolis who in the words of Shakespeare's own monarch has "crepte" in.<sup>37</sup> More crucially, not only is he attempted to be, but cannot be, expelled, he has now written himself into the civic life of the city. In a vague multiculturalist critical practice, Aaron's black child may make an esthetically pleasing composite twin with the fairer but equally racially mixed one of his countryman Muletius that is substituted for it as the emperor's heir and Rome's future potentate, but both together reactively highlight the dangerous miscegenic inroads into the Elizabethan human landscape being made by real-life blacks outside the playhouse. Shakespeare's designing and enactment of the role of Aaron in the public theater is thus plausibly proximate if not exactly coterminous with popular Elizabethan culture's xenophobic resistance to the entry of the colonized black subject into its living mainstream, even as it enjoys and showcases the exoticism of that presence.<sup>38</sup>

### III

To the extent that racial impersonation involves racial embodiment, the assumption of a racial life and the entering into it and possessing it, racial acting is also a form of surveillance. The enactment of the racial subject is an acquisitive knowing of that otherwise unavailable life and a sketching of its exigencies. For compulsively inquisitorial Elizabethan officials such as William Cecil and Francis Walsingham, the government's multiple and minute cartographic surveys of the realm are accompanied by its detailed watchfulness over the population in repeated enforcements of parish record keeping orders inherited from Elizabeth's father's reign, particularly in and around London.<sup>39</sup> But whereas the deadly distrustfulness of a post-Reformation England throughout Elizabeth's reign is focused chiefly on Spanish Catholic conspiracy, its ancillary effect is to establish a relentless spying, on everyone and everything, as the normative procedure of the government, and massively prosecuted by the court's intricate network of intelligencers.<sup>40</sup> As such, performance and the public playhouse are under constant scrutiny, not just from Puritan polemicists and the city alderman, but also from the privy councillors who in allowing the theaters to exist repeatedly inquire into and strictly regulate their operation.<sup>41</sup> The stage's personation of the black life, like the rest of its business, must therefore bear the impress of the government's variable but endless vigilance and a relationship of conformity to it. In this case, the design and the enactment of the politically and sexually subversive role of

Aaron is for the public an instructive illumination and exposure of the incurable perfidy of the black subject hidden in its midst, a symbolic confirmatory examination of the civic treachery and sexual riot that popular travel literature has already paradigmatically suspected him to possess.<sup>42</sup> Shakespeare's necessary connections to powerful Elizabethan personalities and government officials, possibly to Lord Strange, as well as to Lord Hunsdon, and the earls of Pembroke and Southampton, visible a few years later in the public mention of him in the city's theater documents,<sup>43</sup> thus give his performance of Aaron and its ethnic investigation the proportions of a believable deliberateness.

The public inquisition of the black life in the playing of Aaron is most explicit in Lucius's interrogation of him in the play's closing scenes, Shakespeare's agenda of ethnic inquiry becoming more palpable, as mentioned earlier, by SHAXICON's revelation that occasionally he also himself played Lucius. As the total effect of Aaron's black life in the play's white Roman community is evident only at the end of the play, the full review of that life is available only to Lucius as the final redeemer of Roman political order after the bloody carnage of the Saturninus-Tamora-Titus internecine feud. As Aaron is the primary architect of the destruction of the play's civic body (even if Tamora is the secondary one), he is the cancer that is Lucius's immediate responsibility to probe and reveal. That examination of the hidden danger of the black life begins with Lucius's first interrogative encounter with the "the incarnate devil" and "wall'ey'd slave," even before Lucius has entered Rome, and turning as that catechism does on the promise that Aaron holds for Lucius, described by the former himself as the "wonderous things / That highly may advantage thee to hear" (5.1.40–55), it is what presages and initiates his victorious journey to Rome as its new leader.<sup>44</sup> The secret discoveries that the hearing reveals are extensions of the desolate location of the "ruinous monastery" that is the black subject's abode, shown elsewhere in the performance to be either in streets and alleys or in solitary if idyllic gardens (as with Tamora), that is, unfixed and unknowable habitations just like Aaron's historical Elizabethan counterparts. If the design of the forced interview of the captive black subject is basically that of a life for a life, that exchange involves not just the offer of Aaron's life for that of his colored child but more importantly the life of the latter in return for information necessary for the recovery of Rome. That is, it is the surreptitious black life's revelations that will restore the white community to health, accentuated in the urgency of Lucius's opening words: "Say . . . / Why dost not speak? What, deaf? not a word?" (5.1.44–47). Notable in the knowledge thus acquired is not so much the catalog of perfidious deeds ranging from the harmless to the serious, but the discernible, casually rehearsed undertone of its language in which what is learned is already surmised and only in need of confirmation:

For I must talk of murders, rapes, and massacres  
 Acts of black nights, abominable deeds  
 Complots of mischiefs, treason, villainies . . .

(5.1.62–65)

The invisible compulsion of this performed confession is a bit more detectable in Aaron's words in the next scene:

Some devil whisper curses in my ear,  
 And prompt me that my tongue may utter forth  
 The venomous malice of my swelling heart!

(5.3.11–13)

The traceable internal pressures of such lines identify the self-vindicating nature of the investigation of the black life in Shakespeare's textual and theatrical portrayal of Aaron and Lucius, in which the marked body of the racial other is mimicked, possessed, and voiced over to iterate a life suspected and predesigned for it.

It follows, then, that to a degree racial impersonation is also racial programming, as the inscription of dominant culture the psychoanalytic scripting of the repressed black life. If colonialism is a drama of power between colonizer and colonized, or, to use a supplementary scenario, if race relations are an enacted script of control between the power perpetuation of the white and the disempowerment of the black, then the early modern English playwright and his agent, the actor, are surrogate colonizers as Terence Hawkes has suggested<sup>45</sup>—with racializing intent. To this paradigm may be added the third element of psychoanalyses, since, assuming in the fashion of Fredric Jameson that all cultural production is a socially symbolic act, symbiotic homologies can be established between drama and psychoanalysis.<sup>46</sup> Popular drama in particular could be seen as the liminal symbiosis of a collective social surveillance, the assembling, through the examination, of the elements of an imagined social life. In Stephen Greenblatt's words about the Elizabethan stage, these are "the public uses of spectacle to impose normative ethical patterns on the urban masses."<sup>47</sup> If the analyst-patient relationship is thought of as a drama, with role, dialogue, and a linear plot (diagnosis-treatment-cure), the popular English drama can be understood as the psychoanalysis of a national being, the natural programming, that is, the prognosis, intervention in, and production of a desired socius with its particular codes of privilege and prohibition. Given what Jacqueline Rose has insisted is the inherent ethnocentrism of psychoanalysis,<sup>48</sup> this heuristic could be applied to race to describe popular Elizabethan drama's performative fashioning of deviant colonized ethnicity into assimilative compliance in the script of nationhood.

Seen in this fashion, the performative agenda of the scene of Lucius's questioning of Aaron is not only to obtain information from him but also through that very cooperation to manipulatively attempt to render the recalcitrant black subject suitable for a conformable metropolitan citizenship. The real object of this doubly recessed enactment (Lucius as manipulative inquisitor and Aaron as the canny confessor, within the other actor and Shakespeare playing Lucius and Aaron reversibly), however, is not the success of the interrogation but in fact *its failure*. The scripting of an acceptable civic personality in the black subject is not the successful achievement of true repentance and probity in Aaron, but its opposite: the self-demonstration of his essential inability to acquire civility, which will then be his psychic passport to a justifiably disempowered white colonial national life. In other words, the real collective psychoanalysis of the scenes of Aaron's questioning by Lucius is the public modeling of the unredeemability of the black life as the norm for it, otherwise a demotic theatricalization of the proverbial Elizabethan wisdom of not trying to "wash an Ethiopie white."<sup>49</sup> The prosecution of this complex stage agenda is the burden of not just Aaron's gleeful confession of malevolence but also of his emphatic denial of any transformational penitence in himself, the closing scenes of his role being merely the climactic summary of the overall lesson of his portraiture. That, unlike the case of Mary Frith, it is still unknown whether any Elizabethan blacks see their negative framing by Shakespeare in Aaron is irrelevant, for that demonizing black stage iconography, while meant for the black subject, is not dependant on him. Rather, it is dependant on the two thousand white spectators of the Rose who will stamp it into progressively wider cultural currency from each performance of the play.<sup>50</sup> In the circuit of transmission between author-actor and spectator, as the popularity of the negative model of the black life is the popularity of its propagator and vice versa so Shakespeare's exemplary racial profiling of the black life in the role of Aaron is the molding of his public career.

To review the ground covered so far, Shakespeare's racial impersonation in his playing of Aaron may issue from an obscure instinct of racial solidarity but may also involve an instinct of racial critique deployed across the triple agendas of ethnic control, surveillance, and programming. The obverse relationship between racial impersonation as solidarity and as critique is not chronologic but synchronous, and not linear but dialectical, so that the white enactment of the black life is at once projecting and suppressing race, showcasing and defacing it at the same time. These complex crossovers in the regimes of racial impersonation's progress describe the uncertainties of its operation and suggest its variable relationship to the authority of the impersonator. Together, the heterogenous features of Shakespeare's racial impersonation might be said to constitute its instability of *intention*.

## IV

It remains to be considered briefly how racial impersonation involves a collateral cost for the impersonator. Even if in early modern English usage there is a distinction between playing and acting in today's sense, as for instance in Thomas Hobbes's definition in *Leviathan* in 1651 of acting as personation, that distinction, involving a later, more formalized performance with scripted and naturally plausible role depiction for acting as distinct from the earlier, diversely free-form entertainment of playing,<sup>51</sup> is fuzzy and at best merely emergent in the early 1590s. Shakespeare's playing of a black character, no matter how projective and external, involves a substitution of one identity with another, a wearing of black over white. Even if transient, the miming of a person of another race requires the leaving of one's home self for another and the transference of one kind of self-knowing of one kind of phenotypical external to another kind imagined to be flowing from a different skin color. For the white actor staging a black, the reversibility of this transaction is entropic on two levels, that of the social and the psychic: a descent to the reduced material allowances of the mimicked black life for the former, and in consequence, a vulnerability to the constructed opprobrious living practices of that life for the latter. For Shakespeare to impersonate the black subject is to be unavoidably even if incrementally tainted by him, particularly to the white community of his impersonation. This is the reflexive self-marking of racial impersonation, the infection of whiteness by blackness.

As the deepest of all colors, black resists its absorption and has the potential to appropriate all others. Contrary to Callaghan's observation that "black . . . can neither be written on, nor returned . . . to white,"<sup>52</sup> the strength of black's hue does not preclude its whitening but cumulatively threatens the latter's obliteration in the event of white's impersonation of it. This is to say that black can more easily take on and mimic white and retain its integrity than can the latter, which is a function of the converse direction of the resultant pigmentary accretion in the two interactions: black going on white will eventually discolor white more than white going on black will gradually streak black. Transferred symbolically to its human effects, this lesser reversibility of the blacking up of white compared to the greater one of the blanching out of black, puts the white theatrical Elizabethan racial impersonator in a threshold zone that is not quite black and yet no longer just white either. His physical assumption of blackness may be temporary, but in terms of an experience of the black life that cannot be mnemonically disowned even as the accoutrements of its theatrical illusion can at performance's end be shed, his loss of a simple and exclusive whiteness must be permanent. The communal and individual signs of this residual loss in Shakespeare's playing of Aaron operate discretely in the text of the social performance to which it

is contributing and in the psychic performance of the theatrical script itself, although the former perhaps in ways that can be theoretically generalized rather than historically demonstrated with precision. In the interests of foregrounding the importance of such theoretical generalizations, it is worth invoking here Loomba's question "Why is it, for example, that while men dressing as women can be regarded as potentially 'unsettling' gender categories, no such radical meaning attaches to 'blackening up'?"<sup>53</sup>

Early modern English social response to the assumption of blackness, for cosmetic fashion or for performative entertainment, runs a complex range from the silently tolerant to the pointedly critical, and it is complicated further by the busy dialogue against face painting and by the animosity toward the theatrical industry as a whole, within which it is overwritten. Callaghan's earlier cited insistence that beneath the racial dressing up onstage in *Titus* it is white actors appropriating black lives is suggestive not only of the indelibility of whiteness (and of the early capitalist politics of mimesis, which fetishizes and commodifies both the ethnic and the sexual real for commercial gain, so that the blackfaced but white Shakespearean Aaron's claim that "black is better . . . in that it scorns to bear another hue" is actually an inside joke between impersonator and audience), but also of the incarceration of white in black even if momentarily so, and hence of its potential for drowning in it. As Loomba sharply observes, in the early colonialist English age of Anglo-European domination and suppression of people of color Elizabethan racial impersonation onstage stands for the ironic, counterpointing dependence and submission of the white man to the black.<sup>54</sup> Some anxiety about this meaning is visible about a decade later in Dudley Carleton's noticeable unease at the blacked-up spectacle of Queen Anne and her troupe in Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* when he comments that "it became them nothing so well as their red and white," for, as Callaghan explains, it was "a defilement of their pure aristocratic body" (198–99).<sup>55</sup> Whether William Bourne (Bird, Byrd), who plays black roles in the *Battle of Alcazar*, *I Tamar Cham*, and *Frederick and Basilea* (all plays with racial roles) at the Rose a few years earlier in 1597, is the focus in part at least of this same discomfort, in the tavern fight for which he receives an official sentence,<sup>56</sup> and whether that experience is typical of the boisterous lives of his close colleagues such as Charles Massey, Samuel Rowley, Anthony Jeffes, George Somerset, William Cartwright, and Wilbraham, all of whom had also repeatedly played such roles, is uncertain. Irrespective of these and other uncertainties, including how blackface was achieved at the Rose, since there is no evidence of face painting being used, it is the ramifications of assuming a black face onstage that bear significance.

Functioning in the dubious space between a discreet and fluctuating Privy Council support on the one hand, and the relentless hostility of the city aldermen on the other, the Elizabethan player is, in the words of one social histo-

rian of Shakespeare, “always disliked by some.”<sup>57</sup> Pressured perpetually to conform to the limits of his profession set by the Privy Council, maneuvering constantly to avoid becoming the target of puritanical civic attacks on the stage, and scrambling continually to please unpredictable and volatile spectators, dangerous missteps and faux pas with violent consequences must have been the norm rather than the exception in the lives of the performers. While even within their brevity and frequent opacity, records of described or implied violence involving early modern Tudor and Stuart actors, playwrights, and stages describe a spectrum of ordinary scenarios, several among them leave open the possibility of that violence issuing from animosities toward players for what they are performing onstage. Between 1580 and 1626 there are multiple documented instances of acts of deliberate hostility shown toward players by the public, including open fights between them.<sup>58</sup> Among them is the warrant issued for Shakespeare’s arrest in 1596.<sup>59</sup> This is to say that even if players were a boisterous and violent lot, some of their violence may have been their response to the social pressures *on them* for what they were performing onstage.

But the stage’s own admission of the lingering effects of the white impersonation of black is underlined by Callaghan in her above-cited discussion, when she says that “Dense black face painting (which because of the practical difficulty of washing it off meant that the transformation of black to white promised at the end [of *The Masque of Blackness*] had to wait until *The Masque of Beauty*.”<sup>60</sup> Such a metatheatrical acknowledgment is more directly evident in Richard Brome’s *The English Moor*, when Quicksand while painting Millicent up as a black moor and describing to her how to put on black face, apologizes to her that “Heaven’s workmansip [*sic*]” in her face will have to be lost for a while: “For a small time; farewell.”<sup>61</sup> Shakespeare’s own silent signal of the reflexive price of racial impersonation may be the fact that at least according to the evidence of SHAXICON, he does not himself play another racial character again, even when he continues to compose racial roles with greater complexity, and even as he plays some of the roles that support the racialization of minorities onstage (Antonio in *Merchant* and Brabantio in *Othello*). To Elizabethans critical of theater such as Geoffrey Fenton, Stephen Gosson, Philip Stubbes, Anthony Munday, and John Northbrooke, playing someone is to take on his vices—that’s what becoming someone means.<sup>62</sup> As Callaghan has pointed out, even as successful an actor as Nathan Field was denied communion at his parish church.<sup>63</sup> The commonly repeated strictures of Fenton, Gosson, and the others against stage role-playing must have had a pronounced effect in the social experience of Elizabethan racial impersonators.

The psychic reflux of Shakespeare’s racial impersonation in Aaron does, however, register in the slight but significant reversals that Lucius encounters in his interrogation of Aaron. Drawing on the assumption afforded by SHAX-

ICON that Shakespeare played both Aaron and Lucius in different performances, and designating for the purpose of this analysis the Aaron of 5.1 and 5.3 *only* as the psyche of the impersonated black subject and Lucius as that of the Shakespeare actor impersonating him, the quick points that Aaron scores off Lucius amount to the self-pricking of the Shakespeare impersonator by his very impersonation. This is to use the Aaron of the role's final appearances as the performative doppelgänger of the Shakespearean author-actor who plays him in the overall script as a whole. For one thing, the transactional exchange between Aaron and Lucius (the offer to talk and incriminate himself in return for his black baby's life, which will be the gain of the survival of his kind) is itself proposed by Aaron, so that he is more in charge than Lucius. This is akin to the role taking over the actor. For another thing, Aaron extracts more conditions from Lucius than he from him—Lucius has to agree to saving the baby before the confessional therapy can begin:

*Aar.* Swear that he shall, and then I will begin . . .

*Luc.* Even by my god, I swear to thee I will.

(5.1.70–86)

Furthermore even though he invokes a Christian ethic in making Lucius swear by his Christian God that he will keep his word to save Aaron's baby, which is to say that he is willing to rely on Christian belief, his invocation of such an ethic is only to test and probe Lucius's moral integrity, to in fact "adjust" *Lucius's* psychic life (the semantic codes of his belief systems) to include Aaron. This is almost a case of the analyst analyzed, and if psychoanalysis is a hermeneutics of suspicion,<sup>64</sup> then that is here applied by the "patient" on the analyst. Finally, Aaron's confessions do not lead to repentance, despite the urging of Lucius:

*Luc.* Art thou not sorry for these heinous deeds?

*Aar.* Ay, that I had not done a thousand more . . .

(5.1.123–24)

That Lucius's attempted psychological ministrations fall back upon him is implicit in the ironic fact that the session ends with the analyst silencing the patient: "Sirs, stop his mouth, and let him speak no more" (5.1.119–51). This, one might say, is the breaking down of the analyst by the patient, instead of the other way around. In 5.3 what resonate more, possibly because of their terminal location, are Aaron's curses on Lucius and the Romans rather than their invectives on him:

Ah, why should wrath be mute and fury dumb?

I am no baby, I, that with base prayers

I should repent the evils I have done.

(5.3.184–87)



Even if it is the cultural politics of the play's race performance to make the black subject's "wrath" and "fury" have the show's final say, in order to propagate his congenital reprobation as detailed earlier, the unspoken indictment that design silently allows of the ideology of the impersonator's culture, and therefore of his psychic comfort, is the price such impersonation has to pay.

In sum, that in two immediately successive essays in the same critical volume, and in a kind of responsive relationship with each other, Dymphna Callaghan and Ania Loomba have posited two generally opposite but equally compelling results in the endgame of early modern racial stage replication, namely that it is white remaining white in playing black cosmetically for the former and it is white losing itself in black for the latter, indicates that the product of such replication has a variable valency. This might spell another kind of discrepancy between the performance and the outcome of Elizabethan racial impersonation and symptomize another kind of instability in Elizabethan racial impersonation than what was described earlier in this essay. This could be termed the instability of *effect*. If so, both reflexive phenomena—racial impersonation as solidarity and as critique passing into each other, and racial programming passing into racial self inflection—have an operative simultaneity and equivalence, despite their mutually retrograde movements. A contrary *intention* and *effect* inversely collude with each other typically in the Shakespearean playing of the black subject in Aaron. In this sense, *Titus* may constitute as complex, if not a more complex, case of racial impersonation than *Othello* and even *Antony and Cleopatra*.<sup>65</sup>

## V

Whether Shakespeare actually played the role of Aaron must of course remain unknowable. That is a fundamental difficulty that even SHAXICON's tempting analysis cannot alleviate. But even if it is uncertain exactly who played that role at the Rose, this much is certain: someone did, and it was a white male actor. Furthermore, even if Shakespeare did not play that role himself, as far as existing scholarly knowledge is concerned it is highly probable that he wrote it and the play of which it is a vital part. It is equally plausible, as this essay has tried to show, that he was involved in the crafting of the performance of both role and play. In the ultimate analysis, this essay's observations apply to the white Elizabethan acting of the role of black Aaron, irrespective of the particular identity of the actor. Although "rare words" analyses such as that of SHAXICON and other stylometric studies cannot indicate the incidence of unusual word usage, because they deal with word frequency and not word meaning, physiologically self-descriptive phrases such as "woolly hair," "thick lipp'd," "deadly standing eye," and "cloudy mel-

ancholy" that are part of Aaron's lexical repertoire occur nowhere else in Shakespeare. These reflect deliberate aspects of the physical staging of the black man that necessarily become affective elements of the writer recreating him and of the actor playing him. Shakespeare's undeniable historical proximity to this fact merely makes him a useful discursive stand-in for reconstructing its complex psychosocial ramifications.

If, in the one representation of Shakespeare's face with the longest reputation of authenticity, including in the recent evaluation of extant competing portraits by the National Portrait Gallery in London, namely the early seventeenth-century Chandos portrait, the playwright-actor has seemed to his nineteenth-century viewers as "a dark, heavy man, with a foreign expression, . . . thin curly hair, a somewhat lubricious mouth, red-edged eyes, wanton lips, with a coarse expression," and to his contemporary modern ones as being "swarthy" and "foreign" looking, are these perceived attributes the effects of his racial personification of a black man in his early career?<sup>66</sup> Even if some of these elements may either be the products of the portrait's aging, or of later retouchings, those phenomena would not account for the fundamental alienness of the face in the painting common to the perceptions of its historical and contemporary viewers. If the portrait has always seemed not recognizably English, could that misrecognition be the spectral aftereffect of racial impersonation's self-inflection in the moment of its performance?<sup>67</sup>

Any serious consideration of the root developments of Elizabethan theatrical history has a number of competing dates to consider. If the traditional choice for the beginning moment of early modern English popular drama is Burbage's construction of the Theatre playhouse in Shoreditch in 1576, that choice is challenged by the event that preceded and drove that, namely the Privy Council's ordinance of two years earlier allowing the Earl of Leicester's players the permanent authority to perform at times and places of their choosing, and even more significantly by the relatively recently understood construction plans of the Red Lion in 1567. However, if the paucity of actual performances and texts to accompany these early events render them intriguing but not central moments in the true efflorescence of Elizabethan theater,<sup>68</sup> the great volume of documented productions, texts, and professional playwrights in the late 1580s and nineties inevitably claims for this later period the status of a more dependable turning point in the growth of the late Tudor public stage. But whether the emphasis then is on the fortunes of the Admiral's Men, on the founding of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, on the construction of the Globe in 1599, or on the birth and evolution of personated acting within the older tradition of playing in the last decade of the sixteenth century, the time frame of importance becomes the ten years between 1585 and 1595. As it so happens, this window includes the arrival of Shakespeare in the London playing scene and the beginning of his career. It also encom-

passes the critical moment of the racial impersonation of the black man in Aaron.

Irrespective of the precise circumstances that lie behind the first practice of Elizabethan theatrical racial impersonation, and irrespective of whether Shakespeare truly starts that practice or whether he merely renders more professionally powerful and successful an innovation originated by Edward Alleyn (and George Peele),<sup>69</sup> it is the black subject that is located precisely at and within the apotheosis of what will be early modern England's proudest national achievement. To say this is to further suggest that this location is causative, and that the figure of the black man must be seen as crucially contributive to the true success of the theatrical arts of Shakespeare and his colleagues. That is consistent with a postcolonial critical practice's overall view of the still insufficiently recognized debt of an etiulatory Anglo-European cultural and political history to the colonized black peoples of the world. To iterate that debt has been the purpose of this essay.

## Notes

1. *Mimesis and Alterity*, 19.
2. Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 24. For a summary discussion of the derivation of early modern and modern notions of race from early modern colonialism, as well as other arguments about the origins of racism, see my book, *Shakespeare and Race*, 3–4.
3. A responsible postcolonial critical practice seeks to trace both the consequences as well as the origins of the early modern Anglo-European colonial project, that is, examines colonialism's phenomenology in the temporal modes of both its post- and prehistories, within period- and region-specific narratives. Such a critical practice sees sixteenth-century England as early colonial in the sense that the English territorial colonialism that is fully visible later has its ideological inception and impetus in the transoceanic commercial explorations in the reign of the Tudors. Early English colonialism, which I have elsewhere termed the "protocolonial" ("Shakespeare's Spectral Turks," 2), is neither a formally organized project nor a fully formed ideology, but a discernible, rapidly growing national instinct of assertion, domination, and possession, that in its eventual production of colonialism proper bears a viably metonymic relation to it in critical analysis.
4. Some typical examples of this burgeoning field of scholarship are the works of Michael Neill, Martin Orkin, Emily Bartels, Peter Erickson, Kim Hall, Ania Loomba, Margo Hendricks, Dymphna Callaghan, my own work, and that of Stanley Wells and Catherine Alexander.
5. This lacuna has been pointed out by Ania Loomba, "Shakespeare and Cultural Difference," 189–90.
6. That it has no knowledge of traditionally ascribed play dates and Shakespearean authorship is emphasized by David Kathman in "Critically Examining Oxfordian Claims," part 7. Foster's disavowal of historical conclusions is in SHAXICON '95,

1. Foster repeats the warning in his response to the pointed questions asked by Steve Sohmer in the electronic discussion list called SHAKSPER in November 1995.

7. Two of the strongest challenges to SHAXICON were those of Diana Price, "Shaxicon and Shakespeare's Acting Career," and Ward E. Y. Elliott and Robert J. Valenza, "Glass Slippers and Seven-League Boots: C-Prompted Doubts About Ascribing *A Funeral Elegy* and *A Lover's Complaint* to Shakespeare." For Foster's recantation, see William S. Niederkorn, "A Scholar Recants on His 'Shakespeare' Discovery."

8. Brian Vickers calls it counterfeiting ("*Counterfeiting*" *Shakespeare: Evidence, Authorship and John Ford's Funerall Elegy*, 450–52), and Gabriel Egan calls it "moribund" (personal Web page at <http://www.gabrielegan.com/index.htm> last accessed September 4, 2006). Others who have used the rare words approach include Bradley Efron and Ronald Thisted, "Estimating the Number of Unseen Species: How Many Words did Shakespeare Know?" (for a comment on Efron and Thisted's study, see Stanley Wells, "The Year's Contribution to Shakespearian Study," p. 228); Gabriel Egan, who has taken it up in his program called SHAXICAN (<http://www.gabrielegan.com/index.htm>); and Gary Taylor (Stanley Wells et al., eds., in *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, 451).

9. E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 2:122–23; David George, "Shakespeare and Pembroke's Men," 305–21; Sidney Thomas, "On the Dating of Shakespeare's Early Plays," 186–93; Carol Chillington Rutter, *Documents of the Rose Playhouse*, 78; and "Shakespeare's Life," 5; David L. Roper, "Henry Peacham's Chronogram: The Dating Of Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus."

10. Chambers, vol. 4, appendix C.

11. Andrew Gurr, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres*, 46.

12. Rutter, 78. Equally popular were other plays with racialized characters in them, such as Peele's *Mully Mahomet* and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.

13. Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race*, 43.

14. J. C. Maxwell, ed., *Titus Andronicus*, xxx; Naomi Liebler, *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, 133, 145.

15. Eldred Jones, "The Physical Representations of African Characters," 18–19; Dymrna Callaghan, "'Othello Was a White Man,'" 195, 198.

16. *Shakespearean Stage*, 69–81; also see Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Professional Career*, 103–6.

17. The extensive body of travel writing known to the Elizabethans would typically include John Mandeville's *Travels*; Leo Africanus's *A Geographical Historie of Africa*; William Towerson's "Voyage to Guinea in 1555"; Richard Eden's *The Decades of the New World and West Indies* and *The History of Travel*; Richard Hakluyt's *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*; and Samuel Purchas's *Hakluytus Posthumus*.

18. "'Othello Was a White Man,'" 193.

19. Alexander Legatt, *Jacobean Public Theatre*, 80.

20. *Ibid.*, 80–81.

21. *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice*, 90 and 82, respectively.

22. *Pleasant Notes from Don Quixote*, cited by Legatt, 33.

23. *Jacobean Public Theatre*, 37.

24. Ibid., 34.
25. SHAXICON '95, 5.
26. Chambers 2:329, 346. Chambers, in the same page in which he records the reference, does point out, however, that the dates involved cast some doubt over Joseph Taylor's acting direction by Shakespeare; Gurr, *Staging*, 45; A. M. Nagler, *Shakespeare's Stage*, 76.
27. "Shakespeare and Cultural Difference," 189, and "'Othello Was a White Man,'" 194, respectively.
28. See the essays by Nabil Matar, "The Renegade in English Seventeenth Century Imagination," and C. A. Patrides, "'The Bloody and Cruell Turke': The Background of a Renaissance Commonplace." The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* (2:2490) lists two instances of this use of the word in the late 1590s, one in 1598 and one in 1599, the latter by Hakluyt himself in the second volume of his *Principall Navigations*. John Florio's Italian-English dictionary lists this use of the word once in 1598: "Rinegato, a renegado, a foresworne man, one that hath renounced his religion"; see the Early Modern English Dictionaries Database (EMEDD) compiled by Ian Lancashire at the University of Toronto, accessible at <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/english/emedd/emedd.html>.
29. See 539 of his *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, for his frank confession of the English "confus[ion] of nations . . . [and] names."
30. M. R. Ridley, ed., *Othello*, l–li. The expression is originally Samuel Taylor Coleridge's in his *Shakespearean Criticism* 1:42, but Ridley's discussion of what he tries to imply is absurdly racist Victorian criticism is of course itself deeply inflected with racist assumptions; for a discussion of the unfortunate racism of Ridley's remarks, see Karen Newman's "'And Wash an Ethiop White,'" 143–45.
31. Following the tentative initial citations of a few of these records by W. E. Miller ("Negroes in Elizabethan London"), Eldred Jones (*The Elizabethan Image of Africa*), Thomas Forbes (*Chronicle from Aldgate*), and Roslyn Knutson ("A Caliban in St. Mildred Poultry"), I present my comprehensive study of these records in my forthcoming book, *Imprints of the Invisible: Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1676*, in which there are 137 documentations of black people in London as well as elsewhere in England in Shakespeare's lifetime alone. The total number of documented references to black people in early sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England that I have found are several times that number.
32. See "The Elizabethan Image of Africa," 20; Meyers, "Lawsuits," 157, 163, and "Elizabethan Marranos Unmasked"; and entry for May 5, 1597, vol. 234 in Simon Foreman's unpublished medical casebooks.
33. Best, in *Principall Navigations*, 2:155 and 7:262–64.
34. For instance, in St. Martin in the Fields, Westminster, in 1573; in St. Mary Magdalene, Bermondsey, also in 1573; in St. Botolph, Bishopsgate, in 1575; in St. Pancras, Soper Lane, in 1578; in St. Mary Magdalene, Milk Street, in 1593; in St. Olave, Hart Street, in 1598; in St. Margaret, Westminster, in 1601; in All Hallows, London Wall, in 1606; in St. Nicholas, Deptford, in 1613; and in St. Botolph, Aldgate, in 1618. Even if the opacity of Elizabethan naming practices, the inconsistencies of improvisatory documentation procedures, the vagaries of sixteenth-century English orthography, and errors in the antiquarian Victorian transcriptions of these records

prevent certainty of racial identification in some cases, the majority of the records quite clearly specify black people through a consistent use of descriptors such as "Negro"/"negra," "neger," "blackamore/blackamoor(e)," "moor," "Blackman"/"blacky," "Ethiop," singly and in combination with all variations thereof.

35. *Acts of the Privy Council*, 26:16–17, 20–21.

36. For an extended discussion of this point, see my essay "Shakespeare's Spectral Turks."

37. In the deportation order of 1601. The original manuscript has the expression "crepte," whereas John Roche Dasent in his *Acts of the Privy Council* (which is the first publication of these orders) incorrectly transcribed this as "carried." See the facsimile of the original manuscript of the order in the Marquess of Salisbury Collections in Hatfield House, which Eldred Jones provides on p. 19 of his *Elizabethan Image of Africa*.

38. On Elizabethan xenophobia, even against other Europeans, see Linda Yungblutt's revealing study, *Strangers Settled Here among Us: Policies, Perceptions, and the Presence of Aliens in Elizabethan England*.

39. Mark Koch, "Ruling the World," 118–21; J. Charles Cox *The Parish Registers of England*, 1–7; W. E. Tate, *The Parish Chest*, 43–45. Also see generally, G. R. Elton's *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell*.

40. See Alastair Plowden, *The Elizabethan Secret Service*, 16–17, 44; A. Haynes, *Invisible Power: The Elizabethan Secret Service*, 6–8.

41. Rutter, 9–12.

42. On the contribution of Elizabethan travel literature to popular racial morphologies, see Emily Bartels's two essays, "Richard Hakluyt and the Elizabethan Construction of Africa," and "Making More of the Moor."

43. Entry of March 15, 1595, in the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Queen's Chamber, in which Shakespeare is listed as a payee, along with Richard Burbage and William Kempe, for a Christmas performance before the queen (Public Record Office, Exchequer, Pipe Office, Declared Accounts, E351/542 f107v; cited Schoenbaum, 136).

44. My text of the play here, and throughout this essay, is G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

45. *Shakespeare's Talking Animals*, 212.

46. I am implying the basic thesis of his book, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*.

47. "The Improvisation of Power," 50. Leggatt also says something close to this when in discussing the atmosphere of the Jacobean public playhouse he refers to the "sustained flow of excitement" it generated as "the sense of community popular culture seeks to create" (43). His discussion of the effect of Jacobean public performances (39–45) is helpful overall, and supportive of what I am saying here.

48. In Wolf Sachs, "Introductions: Part Two," in *Black Hamlet*, 52.

49. For a cultural history of the phrase, and its pervasive Elizabethan usage, see Karen Newman's essay, "'And Wash the Ethiop White,'" 140–41ff.

50. The number of spectators at the Rose is based on the calculations of Carol Chillington Rutter from the dimensions of the theater foundations excavated in 1989.

Her estimates are 1,600 spectators before the Rose was enlarged in 1592, and 400 more after that date (*Documents of the Rose Playhouse*, xi, xiv). This figure is compatible with the greater one of the Globe reported by the Spanish ambassador in 1624 (Gurr, *Playgoing*, 20).

51. *Leviathan*, 1.16, cited by Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations*, front matter ff. xi; for discussions of the distinctions between “playing,” “acting,” and “personation,” and the progressive development over the course of the sixteenth century of “playing” into “acting” into “personation,” see William Ingram, *The Business of Playing*, 67–91 for the first, Weimann, 131–36, for the first and the second; and both Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, 73–81 and Thomson, 104–8 for the second and third. The distinction between “playing” and both “acting” and “personation,” is greater than that between “acting” and “personation,” and my point here is that the later distinction is discernible only in the late 1590s onward. The natural plausibility we attribute to or expect of acting corresponds to the evolving, late Elizabethan notion of “personation.”

52. “‘Othello was a White Man,’” 198.

53. “Shakespeare and Cultural Difference,” 189–90.

54. *Ibid.*

55. “‘Othello was a White Man,’” 198–99.

56. *Casting Shakespeare’s Plays*, 28; Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, 58.

57. Ivor Brown, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, 139.

58. In addition to the incident of William Bird cited above, and of Nathan Field cited below, there are the following: In April 13, 1580, Robert Leveson and Lawrence Dutton, two of the Earl of Oxford’s players, were involved in a scuffle with gentlemen of the Inns of Court, for which they were jailed at Marshalsea prison (Dasent’s *Acts of the Privy Council*, 11:445, 11:37, 112; Chambers, 14:280; Gurr, *Playgoing*, 118). Gurr believes, however, that the incident is not a part of the “hostility of pulpit or Guildhall” (*Playgoing*, 119). On May 26, 1580 there “was a certayne fraye betwene the sevauntes of th’earle of Oxforde and the gentlemen of the Innes of Courtes” (*Acts of the Privy Council*, 11:445, 12: 37, 112; Chambers, 4:280). In July 1580 Thomas Chesson, an Oxford player, is released from Gatehouse jail on a one-year bond of good behavior (Dasent, *Acts of the Privy Council*, 11:445, 12:37, 112; Gurr, *Playgoing*, 118–19). On July 11, 1581, certain gentlemen of the Inns of Court (Parr Stafferton and his group) assaulted Arthyr Kynge, Thomas Goodale, and others (Lord Berkeley’s Men), because of which all parties were detained by the Lord Mayor’s City of London order, as was reported to Burghley by William Fleetwood (Gurr, *Playgoing*, 67–68, 119–20). According to Gurr, the incident is also not a part of the “hostility of pulpit or Guildhall” (*Playgoing*, 119), and “must have had a social origin, the common players facing the arrogant and idle young gentlemen in a hot summer” (Gurr, *Playgoing*, 68). In 1583, at the Red Lion, there was a scuffle over one of the payment boxes when a local man tried to see the play being performed without paying, “A scuffle ensued, two sharers left the stage to assist the gatherers; the culprit was eventually chased and stabbed. . . . the cheated box-holder was John Singer, a sharer and one of the founding-players of Queen Elizabeth’s company” (G. M. Pinciss, “The Queen’s Men, 1583–1592,” *Theatre Survey* 11 (1970): 51–52; cited in Bentley, *Profession*, 95). In 1596 a warrant was issued for the arrest of William

Shakespeare and others for threatening one William Wayte (Public Record Office, Court of King's Bench, Controllment Roll, Michaelmas Term 1596, KB 29/234; cited by Samuel Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare: A Documentary Life*, 146). In 1605, Will Kempe, along with Robert Armin and others, were in a complaint filed by the London aldermen to the Privy Council for "derogatorily" representing aldermen onstage at the Blackfriars (John Payne Collier, *Memoirs of the Principal Actors*, 117). In 1611 William Ostler, a player, is mentioned in the epigram of John Davies of Hereford, *Scourge of Folly*, as being in a fight in which he had his head broken (Chambers, 2:331). In 1622, at the Red Bull, a player by the name of Richard Baxter was challenged by a feltmaker's apprentice by the name of John Gill who, while sitting on the edge of the stage, had been injured by Baxter in a stage sword fight performed by the latter (Gurr, *Playgoing*, 133; 19). In 1627, Richard Errington, the leader of a provincial company on tour in Ludlow was involved in a fracas while doing money collection for an ongoing performance of his company (John Tucker Murray, *English Dramatic Companies, 1558–1642*, 2:326; cited in Bentley, *Profession*, 96).

59. In 1596 a warrant of "attachment" "for fear of death" was issued against Shakespeare, Francis Langley, his wife Dorothy Spear, and Anne Langley on behalf of one William Wayte. William Wayte "swore before the Judge of Queen's Bench that he stood in danger of death, or bodily hurt," from "William Shakspeare" and three others. "The magistrate then commanded the sheriff of the appropriate county to produce the accused . . . who had to post bond to keep the peace, on pain of forfeiting the security" (Public Record Office, Court of King's Bench, Controlment Roll, Michaelmas Term 1496, K.B. 29/234; cited by S. Schoenbaum, 146). This may be the same incident mentioned by Ivor Brown on 124. If so, both Ivor Brown and Schoenbaum add that the judge was a corrupt character named William Gardiner, who was later exposed as a swindler. Ivor Brown's mention makes it unclear whether the complaint was brought by Gardiner himself, or whether he issued the orders against Shakespeare on behalf of Wayte whom Ivor Brown doesn't mention. Schoenbaum identifies Langley as a money broker involved in the building of the Swan playhouse, and observes that "Somehow Shakespeare was drawn into this feud."

60. "Othello Was a White Man," 199.

61. Cited by Eldred Jones, "Physical Representation," 19–20

62. For instance, Fenton typically laments "the corruption of the willes of the players and the assistauntes . . . [as] such disguised plaiers given over to all sortes of dissolucion . . . [have not] a wil to do good . . ." (*A Forme of Christian Policie*, in Chambers, 4:285–86); Gosson argues "In Stage Plays for a boy to put one the attyre, the gesture, the passions of a woman; for a meane person to take upon him the title of a Prince with counterfeit porte, and traine, is by outwarde signes to shewe them selves otherwise than they are . . ."; (*An Apologie of the School of Abuse*, in Chambers, 4:207, and *The Confutation of Plays*, in Chambers, 4:215–17); Stubbes asks, "Do they [players and plays] induce whoredom & unclennes? . . . For prooffe thereof, but marke the flocking and running to Theatres & curtens . . . Then thee goodly pageants being done, every mate sortes to his mate, every one brings another homeward . . . verie friendly, and in their secret conclaves (covertly) they play the *Sodomits* or worse" (*Anatomie of Abuses*, in Chambers, 4:223–24); Munday asserts, "And as for those staggers themselves, are they not commonlie such kind of men in their conversa-



tion, as they are in profession? Are they not as variable in harte, as they are in their partes? Are they not as good practisers of Bawderie, as inactors? . . . doth not their talke on the stage declare the nature of their disposition?" (*A Second and Third blast of retrait from plaies and Theatres*, in Chambers, 4:212); Northbrooke insists, "in playes you shall learne all things that appertayne to crafte, mischiefe, deceytes, and filthiness . . . shall not you learne, then, at such interludes howe to practise them?" (*A Treatise, wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes &c commonly used on Sabboth day are reproved*, in Chambers, 2:198–99).

63. Mentioned by Field himself in his letter, "Field the Players Letter to Mr. Sutton, Preacher at St. Mary Overs," in 1616, protesting what he implies is the preacher's attempt to "hinder the Sacrament and banish me from myne owne parishe Church"; see Chambers 4:259. Callaghan cites this incident without elaboration in "What's at Stake in Shakespeare Studies?" 21–22. Of course, the incident could have had reasons other than displeasure with Field's acting career as well, but that reason is also a good probability.

64. Jacqueline Rose in Sachs, 46.

65. Because *Antony and Cleopatra* involves a boy actor playing what to the Elizabethans was historically a colored, "tawny" woman, the psychological dynamics of racial impersonation in that performance must have been extremely complex. For a summary discussion of the Elizabethan belief about Cleopatra as a colored woman, see my book *Shakespeare and Race*, 165–66.

66. The nineteenth-century comment is by J. H. Friswell, "The National Gallery Exhibition, 1866," 116. The contemporary responses are by James Adams, "This one is (probably) Will, portraiture expert says," A3, and by Sue Bond in her review of Stephanie Nolan's *Shakespeare's Face*.

67. I am indebted to the editor of *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, Susan Cerasano, for pointing me toward the insights offered by the Chandos portrait for my argument in this essay.

68. Ingram, 64; Weimann, *Author's Pen*, 111–12.

69. There is a possibility that Shakespeare and Peele may have collaborated in the writing of *Titus Andronicus*; see the essay by MacDonald P. Jackson.

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